

Message Text

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PAGE 01 RANGOO 01202 01 OF 02 290918Z

ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 IO-13 /068 W

-----290924Z 046678 /11

R 290645Z APR 77

FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3398

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 RANGOON 1202

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, BM

SUBJ: THE MOMEIK BATTLE

1. SUMMARY. AN ARMED FORMATION OF THE BURMESE COMMUNIST PARTY (BCP), ESTIMATED AT 300-500 MEN, APRIL 11 ATTACKED AND HEAVILY DEFEATED A BURMA ARMY BATTALION HEADQUARTERS UNIT AND SECURITY ELEMENTS (60-80 MEN) AT MOMEIK, ON THE WESTERN EDGE OF THE SHAN STATE. ALTHOUGH A SMALL BATTLE, AND ONE WHOSE IMPORTANCE IS BEING DOWNPLAYED BY THE GUB, THE BATTLE HAS A NUMBER OF POSSIBLY SIGNIFICANT ASPECTS. END SUMMARY.

2. MOMEIK (MONG MIT) IS LOCATED AT THE FAR WESTERN EDGE OF THE SHAN STATE ABOUT 135 MILES NORTH OF MANDALAY ON THE EDGE OF THE IRRAWADDY PLAIN. IT LIES ON ONE OF THE TWO LAND ROUTES FROM LOWER BURMA TO THE MAJOR KACHIN STATE TOWN OF BHAMO, AND IS LOCATED ON A BRANCH OF THE SHWELI RIVER, WHICH FLOWS INOT THE IRRAWADDY.

3. MOMEIK WAS ATTACKED EARLY IN THE MORNING OF APRIL 11 BY A FORCE OF PERHAPS 300-500. THE ATTACKING FORCE, ACCORDING TO ONE REPORT, FIRST CUT THE ROAD TO MOGOK, THE MOST LIKELY SOURCE OF BURMA ARMY REACTION. THE FORCE THEN ATTACKED THE HEADQUARTERS AND SECURITY
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PAGE 02 RANGOO 01202 01 OF 02 290918Z

ELEMENTS OF THE BURMA ARMY 12TH REGIMENT (EQUIVALENT TO A BATTALION) WHICH WAS LOCATED IN THE HAW (PALACE) OF THE FORMER MONG MIT SAWBWA (MINOR PRINCE). COMPLETE SURPRISE WAS APPARENTLY ACHIEVED, AND THE BURMA ARMY UNIT WAS HEAVILY DEFEATED; THE BATTALION COMMANDER, LIEUTENANT COLONEL KYI MAUNG, WAS KILLED. FOLLOWING THE BATTLE THE BCP FORCE REPORTED SEIZED 500,000 KYATS

AND 20 VISS (72 POUNDS) OF OPIUM FROM THE LOCAL STATE BANK BRANCH, BURNED SOME WAREHOUSES, PROPAGANDIZED MOMEIK RESIDENTS, AND, SIX OR MORE HOURS LATER, WITHDREW, REPORTEDLY FIRST WEST AND THEN NORTH TOWARDS THE SHWELI RIVER.

4. THE FIRST BURMA ARMED FORCES REACTION REPORTEDLY OCCURRED DURING THE WITHDRAWAL, WHEN IPE RETREATING FORCE WAS TWICE ATTACKED BY THE BURMA AIR FORCE. THE BCP FORCE APPARENTLY SUFFERED ITS PRINCIPAL BATTLE CASUALTIES DURING THESE ENCOUNTERS, AND ALSO LOST SOME TRUCKS (APPARENTLY SEIZED AT MOMEIK), AS WELL AS SOME WEAPONS. TOTAL CASUALTIES FOR THE ENTIRE BATTLE WERE 53 DEAD FOR THE BCP; THE PRESS REPORTED 19 BURMA ARMY CASUALTIES.

5. THE BATTLE WAS IMPORTANT ENOUGH FOR THE MINISTER OF DEFENSE, GENERAL KYAW HTIN, TO VISIT MOMEIK APRIL 14 WITH A LARGE PARTY OF VIP'S; WHILE THERE KYAW HTIN, ACCORDING TO PRESS ACCOUNTS, SPOKE "WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT" AND GAVE "NECESSARY INSTRUCTIONS" TO BURMA ARMY PERSONNEL. HOWEVER, GUB OFFICIALS IN RANGOON ARE PLAYING DOWN THE BATTLE'S SIGNIFICANCE IN PRIVATE CONVERSATION. GENERAL KYAW HTIN HAS PRIVATELY DISMISSED THE BATTLE AS A SUPPLY RAID, WHILE COLONEL MYO AUNG, A HIGH INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL, VIEWS THE BATTLE AS ARISING FROM A BCP NEED TO ACHIEVE AT LEAST ONE HIGHLY PUBLICIZED VICTORY BEFORE THE ONSET OF THE MONSOON.

6. THE BATTLE WAS SIGNIFICANT FOR THE FOLLOWING REASONS:
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PAGE 03 RANGOO 01202 01 OF 02 290918Z

-- IT SHOWED GOOD BCP INTELLIGENCE AND PLANNING. THE PLANNERS OF THE ATTACK APPARENTLY KNEW HOW MANY BURMA ARMY SOLDIERS WERE IN THE TOWN, THEIR DISPOSITIONS, AND HOW TO APPROACH THE TARGET. THERE IS EVEN A REPORT THAT THE BCP PICKED A TIME FOR THE ATTACK WHEN THE MOMEIK GARRISON WAS ABOUT TO BE ROTATED, A TRADITIONALLY ADVANTAGEOUS MOMENT.

-- IT MAY BE AN INSTANCE OF KACHIN INDEPENDENCE ARMY (KIA/BCP COOPERATION. MOMEIK IS IN AN AREA WHERE THE KIA, WITH WHICH THE BCP IS NOW FORMALLY ALLIED, IS STRONG. IT SEEMS UNLIKELY THAT THE BCP WOULD HAVE ATTACKED WITHOUT TOUCHING BASE WITH THE KIA.

-- THE BATTLE MAY ALSO HAVE BEEN A POLITICAL GESTURE TOWARD THE KIA, DESIGNED TO DEMONSTRATE THE ADVANTAGES OF BEING ALLIED WITH THE BCP. (THERE IS REPORTEDLY STILL SOME DISSENT WITHIN THE KIA OVER THE DESIRABILITY OF THE ALLIANCE.)

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PAGE 01 RANGOO 01202 02 OF 02 290922Z
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 RANGOON 1202

-- THE BATTLE BROUGHT THE BCP TO THE EDGE OF THE
UPPER BURMA PLAIN FOR THE FIRST TIME. AS BURMA IS
LARGELY RUN BY ETHNIC BURMANS FOR ETHNIC BURMANS, A
PRINCIPAL GUB OBJECTIVE IS TO KEEP THE BCP (AND OTHER
INSURGENTS) IN THE HILLS AND AWAY FROM BURMAN POPULATION
CENTERS. THE APPEARANCE OF A BCP FORCE, EVEN MOMENTARILY,
AT THE EDGE OF THE PLAIN MUST THEREFORE BE CAUSE FOR GUB
CONCERN.

-- THE ATTACK MAY HAVE BEEN DESIGNED TO DISTRACT THE
BURMA ARMY FROM OTHER OPERATIONS IN MORE NORMAL BCP OPERA-
TIONAL AREAS. IN ADDITION, THE ATTACK MAY HAVE THE
ADVANTAGE, FROM THE BCP VIEWPOINT, OF CAUSING THE BURMA
ARMY TO HESITATE BEFORE CONCENTRATING BURMQUARMY FORCES
STATIONED IN THE NORTHERN SHAN STATE AND USING THEM
ELSEWHERE.

7. THE MOMEIK BATTLE SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN CAREFULLY
THOUGHT OUT IN ADVANCE, BOTH IN REGARD TO MILITARY
TACTICS AND THE SELECTION OF MOMEIK AS A TARGET.
POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS WERE PROBABLY A SIGNIFICANT
FACTOR IN THE SELECTION OF MOMEIK. THE BATTLE ITSELF,
HOWEVER, WAS A RELATIVELY MINOR ACTION. WHILE A SETBACK,
IT HAS NOT AFFECTED THE BURMA ARMY'S FIGHTING ABILITY,
NOR CAN IT BE TAKEN AS EVIDENCE THAT THE RELATIVE MILITARY
CAPABILITY OF THE BCP HAS CHANGED.

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PAGE 02 RANGOO 01202 02 OF 02 290922Z

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Message Attributes

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